

Three Belgian Ales

Styles Series: Belgian Ales book produced by Brewers Publications. For a list of this series and other references, check out our Brewing Books section.

INTRODUCTION

Belgium, a small country tucked between France, Germany and the Netherlands, hosts over 100 local breweries and 600 commercially available beers. So many beers in a country that takes just a few hours to drive through has created fierce competition, outstanding quality ales, and the innovation to create new styles and improve upon the old. From the rich malt of Dubbels and Tripels to the fruity tang of spontaneously fermented Lambics, a world of flavors and tradition exists in this small country. There is far too rich a history in this tiny region to offer a complete scope of brewing analysis and recipes, but we have created two new house recipes and delved into some of the more interesting categories to give you a taste of this "Disneyland of beers." This discussion of Belgian Ales will include three of our house recipes: "Cellar Squared Belgian Ale," our original Belgian Abbey Dubbel style beer; "Cerberus Tripel," a strong golden treat; and "Blanche De Ballard," a spiced and complex Witbier. While these three only begin to uncover the multitudes of Belgian styles, they will be a good introduction to this new world of beer awaiting discovery. Enjoy!

HISTORY

During the 17th century, monastic life flourished in Europe. It is estimated that there were over 500 monasteries of the Cistercian order; these were monks for whom life was lived according to strict rules, with an emphasis on manual labor. At this time, a monk named Rance' established the order of "Cistercians of Strict Observance" at the "Abbaye de la Trappe" in Normandy. These men became known as the Trappist monks, and lived their lives according to very strict rules.

The Trappist monks were very self-sufficient; producing most of the products and foodstuffs that they needed for survival. One of the commodities they produced for consumption and sale was beer. The Trappist monks' beer was often of higher quality than other private breweries because they grew their own grain and other ingredients.

In the late 1700's, Belgium was under French Rule, and in 1796 the French Revolution put an end to monastic life in Belgium. Monasteries were looted and some were sold or destroyed. It took over 40 years for the monks to return to Belgium, and by the 1930's, all the Trappist Monasteries were producing private stocks of beer, only available on site. It wasn't until after World War II that the Trappist monasteries began to make their beer commercially available. It was at this time that the Trappist's beers began to gain a reputation for their quality and strength. Many other breweries began to duplicate the Trappist style, and it became so popular that in 1962 Trappist beer was given legal status as a style of beer unto itself.

Legally, a beer can only be called "Trappist" if it is brewed under the strict control of a handful of Trappist monasteries. Thus, beer brewed by other breweries took on the name "Abbey Style" to indicate that it was made in the style of the Trappist monasteries.

Of the hundreds of Trappist and Abbey Style beers brewed in Belgium, there are three styles, the Dubbel (Double), the Tripel (Triple), and the Witbier (White Beer) that we will focus on in this piece.

The Dubbel style beer most likely derives its' name from the brewing practices used widely for centuries in Europe before lautering or sparging practices became popular. Most breweries made multiple batches from one grain mash, a process called "parti-gyle" brewing. The first, high gravity runnings of the mash were drawn, and made into one small batch. The remaining grains had more water added and were mashed again, to retrieve the the lower gravity runnings. These second runnings were made into a larger, weaker batch of beer called a "simple." The first batch had a gravity roughly double of the "simple" beer, and was therefor called a "Dubbel." These ales are often ruddy to dark brown, with a solid malt character, lightly balanced with restrained hop flavor and boquet and the unique fruitiness of Belgian yeast strains.

The Tripel style was created by the Abbaye Notre Dame du Sacre Coeur, Westmalle. Since its' inception, over 40 other breweries have tried there hand at this strong, pale beer. The origins of the style name Dubbel are used in naming this beer, roughly three times the strength of a simple. These unique beers are often up to 10% alcohol by volume, yet remain a light golden color and hold a thick rocky head. The use of Belgian Candi sugar helps to maintain the light flavor and aroma of these ales. Some breweries have tried using other ingredients, such as orange peel and coriander, but these are more common in the third beer in this discussion, the Witbier.

Witbier, or white beer, gets its' name from the hazy appearance that the use of wheat contributes. Using high proportions of malted and unmalted wheat in beer is quite common in Belgian ales, such as Lambics. Witbiers were originally brewed to be drank very quickly after primary fermentation, as it would sour quickly. In order to cover the souring effect, spices were added to the brew. The most common combination of spices used in Witbiers today is orange peel and coriander. These combine with the nutty-sweet aroma of the grains to create a very complex boquet and flavor. The style was unfortunately almost lost, but is recently reliving a popularity as all Belgain ales are being discovered by many American micro-breweries. This beer is a true refresher during the hot days of Summer, and a unique addition to your line-up of homebrews.

STYLE DEFINITION

American Homebrewer's Association Style Guidelines

| | BELGIAN DUBBEL |
|-----------------------|--|
| Color | Dark Amber to Brown |
| Body | Medium-full to Full |
| Flavor Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rich maltiness• Fruity/estery |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clove/spiciness from alcohol • No diacetyl |
| Hop Bitterness | Low |
| Hop Flavor/Aroma | Very low to none |
| Original Gravity | 1.040 - 1.080 |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| | BELGIAN TRIPEL |
| Color | Pale to deep gold |
| Body | Medium |
| Flavor Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisp and fruity • Lightly balanced malt sweetness • Alcoholic undertones • No diacetyl |
| Hop Bitterness | Low |
| Hop Flavor/Aroma | Moderate to none |
| Original Gravity | 1.065 - 1.095 |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| | BELGIAN WITBIER |
| Color | Pale straw to very light gold |
| Body | Light, high carbonation |
| Flavor Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmalted wheat flavor • Citrus/coriander character • Slightly phenolic • No diacetyl • May have slight lactic sourness |
| Hop Bitterness | Restrained, may be bitterness from orange peel |

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Hop Flavor/Aroma | Very low or no flavor, no hop bouquet |
| Original Gravity | 1.042 - 1.055 |

RECIPES

Cellar Squared Belgian Ale

This Abbey Dubbel style beer is deep and rich, using a variety of Belgian specialty grains. Belgian dark candi sugar adds authenticity to the brew, and the Belgian Abbey II liquid yeast will further match the the slightly tart and fruity nose of this style.

EXTRACT RECIPE

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| 6 lbs. | British Light Bulk Malt Syrup |
| 1 lb. | Munton & Fison Light Dry Malt |
| 1 lb. | Belgian Dark Candi Sugar |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Biscuit Malt |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Caravienne Malt |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Caramunich Malt |
| 1 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Boiling) |
| 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Finishing) |
| 1 pkg. | Munton's Dry Ale Yeast or Belgian Abbey II Ale Liquid Yeast |
| O.G. 1.067 - 1.076 | |

ALL-GRAIN RECIPE

| | |
|---------|-------------------------|
| 9 lbs. | Belgian Pale Malt |
| 1 lb. | Belgian Malted Wheat |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Biscuit Malt |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Caravienne Malt |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Caramunich Malt |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer hersbrucker Hops (Boiling) |
| 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Finishing) |
| 1 pkg. | Belgian Abbey II Ale Liquid Yeast |
| O.G. 1.067 - 1.076 | |

CERBERUS TRIPEL

This rare style was originally brewed at the Abbaye du Sacre Coeur, Westmalle. Now there are over 40 breweries producing this style worldwide, and this recipe falls in the middle of three of the more popular brews. The use of Belgian candi sugar and specialty grains with light malt combines to create a complex, alcoholic, yet golden ale with a depth of flavor and aroma that can be rediscovered with every goblet. We highly recommend using the Belgian Trappist yeast with this recipe.

EXTRACT RECIPE

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| 6 lbs. | Alexander's Pale Bulk Malt Syrup |
| 4 lbs. | Extra Light Dry Malt |
| 1 lb. | Dry Wheat Malt Extract |
| 1 lbs. | Belgian Clear Candi Sugar |
| 1/4 lb. | Belgian Aromatic Malt |
| 1/4 lb. | Belgian Malted Wheat |
| 1 1/2 oz. | Tettnang Hops (Boiling) |
| 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Flavor) |
| 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Aroma) |
| 1 pkg. | Nottingham Dry Ale Yeast or Trappist High Gravity Liquid Yeast |
| O.G. 1.085 - 1.095 | |

ALL-GRAIN RECIPE

| | |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 9 lbs. | Belgian Pilsner Malt |
| 2 lb. | Belgian Pale Malt |
| 2 lb. | Belgian Malted Wheat |
| 1/4 lb. | Belgian Aromatic Malt |
| 1 lb. | Belgian Clear Candi Sugar |

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 1/2 oz. | Tettnang Hops (Boiling) |
| 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Flavor) |
| 1/2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Aroma) |
| 1 pkg. | Trappist High Gravity Liquid Yeast |
| O.G. 1.085 - 1.095 | |

BLANCHE DE BALLARD WITBIER

A style of Belgian wheat beer enjoying renewed popularity. "Wit" means white, and refers to the light haze that the use of unmalted wheat and oats lend to this beer. To duplicate the authentic slightly sour tang of this style, using the Belgian liquid yeast strain is recommended. There are no finishing hops, so that the aroma and character of the spices and yeast can surface. The best results can be obtained from the coriander by buying the whole seed and grinding it fresh on brew day. A complex and refreshing treat to savor in any season.

EXTRACT RECIPE

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| 4 lbs. | 4 Lbs. Dry Wheat Malt Extract |
| 1 lb. | Extra Light Dry Malt Extract |
| 1 lb. | Unmalted Wheat |
| 1/2 lb. | Rolled Oats |
| 1/2 lb. | Belgian Pilsner Malt |
| 2 oz. | Hallertau Hersbrucker Hops (Boiling) |
| 1/2 oz. | Bitter Orange Peel |
| 1/2 tsp. | Coriander |
| 1 pkg. | Munton's Dry Ale Yeast or Belgian White Beer Liquid Yeast |
| O.G. 1.050 - 1.056 | |

ALL-GRAIN RECIPE

| | |
|---------|--|
| 3 lbs. | Belgian Wheat Malt |
| 4 lb. | Belgian Pilsner Malt |
| 1 lb. | Unmalted Wheat |
| 1/2 lb. | Rolled Oats |
| 2 oz. | Hallertauer Hersbrucker Hops (Boiling) |

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1/2 oz. | Bitter Orange Peel |
| 1/2 tsp. | Coriander |
| 1 pkg. | Belgian White Beer Liquid Yeast |
| O.G. 1.050 - 1.056 | |